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Pelham NEWS

Wink gets the nod as Pelham's top citizen

FRANKI IKEMAN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

John Wink was named Pelham's citizen of the year earlier this month. See full story on page 7.

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Not just bacon and eggs

FRANKI IKEMAN
POSTMEDIA NETWORK

He's on a mission to change his restaurant's image — from diner to fine-dining.

Domenic Chirico, owner of Domenic's On 20, said he wants the public to let go of the family's old restaurants, Domenic's Diner, which had one location in Fonthill and one in Wainfleet.

"As you can see it's not a diner and also we want to do dinners, big time," Chirico said.

"You've got a beautiful bar, you've got a dining area, we have a patio for summer time."

Chirico purchased the property on Highway 20 in Fonthill and opened the restaurant about a year and a half ago.

He said his daughter's restaurant — Domenic's Diner — which used to be located in the area but was destroyed by fire two and a half years ago had an established customer-base that the new restaurant has been able to attract.

The establishment is packed for breakfast and lunch, but the 77-year-old chef said he hopes they will really start attracting a dinner crowd.

"We want to tell the world: 'Hey don't forget, we don't only cook bacon and eggs.' We do have nice dinners and they're very economical. We're not a high-priced house, we're pretty moderate that way."

FRANKI IKEMAN/WELLAND TRIBUNE

Domenic Chirico is pictured at Domenic's On 20.

Chirico has been in the business for 63 years, and as a certified master chef continues to man the kitchen and Domenic's.

The focus of Domenic's is that the food is made-to-order, fresh and local.

"We pride ourselves that everything is made fresh — it's not a boxed food place, or a deep-fryer," he said. "Any chance we get it's 100 per cent local if we can, like our eggs, our potatoes, big item things ... it's all from the farm, we don't buy it from California."

Chirico said the family is in the process of selling the Wainfleet diner to focus all of their time and energy into the Fonthill restaurant. Both Chirico's wife and daughter help run Domenic's On 20.

"We're just a little family trying to make ends meet."

Domenic's On 20 is open seven days a week from 7 a.m. until 10 p.m. except on Sundays and Mondays when the restaurant closes early at 3 p.m.

The Tribune's Biz Buzz column runs every Wednesday. If you have a business tip, email reporter Franki Ikeman at franki.ikeman@sunmedia.ca or call 905-684-7251 ext. 581167.

Communications technology needed for development

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

At a time when Internet communication is becoming increasingly necessary, communities without it are being left behind — especially when it comes to economic development.

Niagara Region chief information officer Stuart Hendrie was in Welland last Friday as part of an initiative working to change that.

Hendrie was at the Welland Civic Square running the first in a series of Niagara workshops to discuss the Southwest Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) initiative, a project launched by the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus to build a high-speed fibre optic network that will extend services to the rural areas that are not being served by telecommunications companies.

But extending high speed internet access to every home and business in the rural areas of South Western Ontario, including Niagara, won't be cheap.

"That's probably like $4- or $5-billion," Hendrie said.

But to start, he said the goals are much more modest.

Multiple levels of government are being asked to pitch in, along with private industries, to put together about $287-million investment to get the project underway.

Hendrie said the organization will be asking the provincial and federal governments to spend $94.3-million each on the project, while municipalities will be asked for $18-million, and private business would be asked for $80.4-million.

To extend high speed service to rural communities throughout Niagara, Hendrie estimated it would cost as much as $35-million. But as part of the SWIFT initiative, the Niagara Region's costs would likely be $2- to $3-million.

"It makes it doable," he said. "I think that's the exciting part of it, it is doable."

Regional Chairman Alan Caslin said being part of SWIFT is one of several initiatives underway in Niagara to "try and create an environment for prosperity, for business to want to locate in Niagara."

"This isn't an option for us in getting fibre optics into the communities that don't have it now. It's a baseline necessity," he said.

"If we truly are focused on creating an environment for economic prosperity in Niagara, then we have to put skin in the game."

Hendrie said about 35 people participated in the workshop in Welland, including a few people from rural parts of Niagara as well as people in the telecommunications industry.

Additional workshops are being organized for other parts of the region, including the rural communities most affected by the initiative.

But Hendrie said it's ironic that the problem they're working to resolve is hampering their efforts to resolve it.

For instance, they're trying to organize and promote workshops in rural communities like Wainfleet and West Lincoln. But in this case using social media websites to promote those meetings is not an option.

"We're not going to get to the people in Wainfleet because they're not connected," he said. "It's interesting for our communications folks because they're trying to think of different ways to get that message out to people when normally they just default to social media."

allan.benner@sunmedia.ca
Twitter: @abenner1

War vet gets poppy-tagged street name

WAYNE CAMPBELL/SPECIAL TO POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Decorated Pelham veteran Jim Summersides, centre, receives from deputy mayor John Durley, left, and Mayor Dave Augustyn a copy of a street sign that will indicate Summersides Boulevard in the new east Fonthill development.

WAYNE CAMPBELL
Special to Postmedia Network

Second World War veteran Jim Summersides has a poppy beside his name on a street sign.

A packed council chamber of friends, legion members and relatives stood to applaud when the popular former member of the First Special Services Force accepted his own copy of a street sign during a meeting of Pelham town council Monday.

Summersides Boulevard will become a major roadway connecting Fonthill's new residential, commercial and institutional development at Rice Road and Regional Road 20 with Pelham Town Square.

It is the first of a series of streets in the east Fonthill development that will be named after local veterans, said Mayor Dave Augustyn.

A poppy on the signs will signify the connection.

"We may go back and change a few signs," the mayor said about adding poppies to streets already named for veterans.

Summersides, 91, was born in Fonthill and lived in Welland.

After the Second World War, he built a home in a veterans subdivision off Quaker Road at the Welland-Pelham boundary.

With his wife Margaret of 70 years, his sons and grandchildren, Summersides listened to the mayor tell the story of his service with what became known as the Devil's Brigade, a forerunner of the American Green Berets and Canadian JTF2 special service units.

The joint Canadian-American unit fought in 22 battles never losing one in Italy and France.

After the war, Summersides worked for Martin Dairy in Welland before switching to Atlas Steels where he worked until retirement.

Augustyn said the longtime member of Royal Canadian Legion Branch 613 has for decades chaired committees organizing youth poster, essay and public speaking contests.

Summersides visits local schools to talk to children about the tragedy of war during Remembrance Day events.

He thanked town council for the street honour. Asked about putting a number on the street sign, he suggested his war service number.

"That's what I was known as for a few years," he said.

NHS axes plan to sell extended care licence

FRANKI IKEMAN
Tribune staff

Niagara Health System has cancelled its plans to sell its licence to operate Welland hospital's extended care unit.

NHS had been in discussions about the possible sale of the licence to operate the ECU beds with other not-for-profit long-term care operators.

"After various opportunities were examined by NHS, our board of directors approved a recommendation at a recent meeting to maintain the licence for the ECU beds," said a news release issued Tuesday.

Suzanne Johnston said the idea to sell the licence pre-dates her time as NHS president, going back to early talks in 2010.

She said final analysis was done in January and it was decided that NHS would continue to operate the 75 beds at Welland's ECU.

"We're excited about it. I think the staff felt very good to hear that they don't have to worry about that," Johnston said.

Welland Mayor Frank Campion said NHS's decision to continue to operate Welland's ECU is "fantastic."

"It is good news," Campion said. "This has been up in the air for several years now and it's been problematic for us."

Campion said Tuesday's announcement didn't come as a total surprise, saying the city had been in discussions with NHS and the hospital administration had been keeping the municipality fairly well informed.

"We've been pursuing a resolution to those beds for ... more than four years since it became an issue," Campion said.

Campion said he's appreciative of the commitment to keeping the beds in Welland, so that people in need of long-term care are able to stay within their community close to family.

"I appreciate them making the right decision and keeping them here instead of trying to make some money from those beds," he said. "It's huge for us because there's people in those beds right now and if they were to leave those people would be displaced."

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More projects for Pelham in 2016

Over the past couple weeks, I have written here about some of the new facilities and roads, sidewalks and bridges the town will complete or work toward this year.

Now, here's more information about other 2016 capital projects.

■ First World War Mortar Restoration: Thanks to some concerned veterans and the public, council approved funds to restore the Great War German trench mortar, including lighting, a pathway and an interpretive plaque. This will complement the wonderful restoration of the lead-lettered cenotaph at Old Pelham Town Hall last year.

We hope to receive federal funds again to help share this important restoration.

■ Peace Park Improvements: At the request of the Fonthill Bandshell volunteers, council agreed to install additional lighting at Peace Park for special events. We will also install a partially underground waste collection system (like Molok) to make garbage and recycling easier and look nicer. At the same time, staff hope to use the excavated dirt to help round-out the bumps in the bowl around the bandshell.

■ Rail Trail: Over the past couple of years, the town has built a walking, jogging and cycling trail on the abandoned Toronto-Hamilton-Buffalo rail line from Centennial Park to Murdock Street.

Since motorized vehicles also travel the trail and have disturbed the gravel, council approved installing signs to discourage that behaviour.

■ Concession Buildings: Council approved repairs to the concession buildings at Harold Black Park (roller doors, siding, washrooms) and at Centennial Park (soffit and facia, eavestroughs). Staff will also work with the Fenwick Lions in attracting grants to add a pavilion to the front of the concession building for special events.

■ Pelham Arches: You will recall that dedicated volunteers built the arches in downtown Fonthill for the 2012 Pelham Summerfest. Since then, the town protected the structure and added lighting. This year, council approved funding to re-protect the wood and directed staff to recommend a long-term plan to protect and/or replace this key town feature.

■ Fonthill Library branch: While I wrote about the Maple Acre renovation a couple weeks ago, council also ratified a decision by the Pelham Public Library Board to renovate the circulation desk area and add basement offices to the Fonthill branch.

■ Fire Service Improvements: Four local fire services share a machine that does a facemask fit-test for breathing apparatus; since the machine needs replacing, Pelham will cover one-quarter of the cost of a new machine. We also approved an annual allocation to replace and upgrade firefighter bunker gear.

■ Planning Work: Council approved funding to help restart the East Fonthill Secondary Plan and to finalize a comprehensive zoning bylaw update in 2016.

Council and I look forward to another busy year of investments and improvements.

You can contact Mayor Dave Augustyn at mayordave@pelham.ca or read past columns at www.pelhammayordave.blogspot.com

Niagara paid a bloody price for Welland Canal

The Welland Canal is a beautiful monument to human achievement. Built between 1913 and 1932, it runs nine metres deep and has eight locks, each 261 metres long.

It has been here for so long, yet for most of us it is part of the scenery — really, how many of you have actually sailed through the Welland Canal?

But the columns produced by the St. Catharines Museum recounting the grisly toll canal construction took — at least 137 lives, mostly young, poor men — have cast a new light on the waterway.

It was built in a different age, when issues like proper supervision, workplace safety and a worker's right to refuse an unsafe assignment were seen in some quarters as radical theories.

Today, a project that racked up nearly seven deaths per year, every year for 20 years, would be shut down and a criminal investigation launched.

The museum's columns have been running in this newspaper for several months now. For a taste of what life and death was like for the fallen workers, consider some of the headlines.

■ On job two weeks, died for $12 per week;

BOB TYMCZYSZYN / POSTMEDIA NETWORK

This calm scene belies a difficult fact — the lives of nearly 140 people were lost over 20 years of construction on the Welland Canal, early in the 20th century.

■ Worker leaves behind wife and five children;

■ Nap turns deadly at stone-crushing plant;

■ Rigger slips and falls under wheels of rail cars.

Clearly, it was a bloody, brutal job for comparatively low wages, often performed by immigrant men whose employment options were extremely limited.

When they died, what was left of their bodies was taken to a local cemetery and buried, often in an unmarked grave. And work continued.

Nearly as galling as the carnage is the attitude shown to the poor men by the government of the day. It promised a monument to their sacrifice — then did nothing for nearly 75 years.

Finally, prodded by this newspaper and especially by Arden Phair, the former museum curator who collected as much data as he could find on the dead workers, plans for a canal workers' memorial began to take shape.

Construction is expected to be finished in 2017.

It's fitting and proper to have a monument to honour the lost men that way.

Possibly more important, though, is that their individual stories be told.

They weren't 137 men who disappeared altogether and were never missed — they went one at a time, in horrific, bloody ways.

The Welland Canal should always be a matter of great pride and human achievement. But never forget the price that was paid.

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Ask to see officer's ID: chief

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

Anyone who is driving and is stopped by a police officer can ask to see the officer's official ID.

Niagara Regional Police Chief Jeff McGuire reminded citizens of that last Friday in light of reports of three recent incidents in which a man impersonating a Niagara police officer pulled over drivers.

McGuire said his officers are professional and won't be offended by a request to produce identification.

Of the three incidents, two involve a man in an unmarked car using flashing police lights to pull over a female driver. In one case, a man approached a woman seated in a car in St. Catharines and identified himself as a police officer.

"Every officer is obligated to provide proper identification," McGuire said during his regular Chat With the Chief online show broadcast from the Postmedia Network studio, and moderated by reporter Grant LaFleche.

Officers are required to carry a metal badge and a warrant card, or full photo ID.

"Our officers are properly trained. No officer should be offended to have to show their identification," McGuire said.

If a person is troubled by the circumstances of being stopped, calling 911 is also an option, he said.

"Safety is the key to people being stopped," McGuire said. "If you truly believe you're in an (urgent) situation, dial 911 and you'll know you are speaking to somebody in the police department right then and there."

The chief advises callers to tell a dispatcher where they are, what's happening, a description of the vehicle and reason for concern. At the very least, it will confirm whether the traffic stop is legitimate.

"We are truly concerned about what's going on right now," McGuire said of the incidents. "And we're appealing to the public as to who this person(s) might be.

"It's a very dangerous practice ... they are committing a criminal offence. We don't want to see this get worse than it already is."

McGuire also spoke to an incident on Queen Street in St. Catharines earlier this week, in which a homeless man had his string of shopping carts filled with cardboard and empty containers removed and dumped by city workers.

An NRP officer was on scene to maintain control.

Eventually, a caseworker with Community Care of St. Catharines-Thorold arrived and helped further defuse the situation.

An NRP pilot project is underway in which a mental health worker goes on patrol with officers on certain shifts in the St. Catharines area. In this week's incident, a mental health person was not on duty.

McGuire said that worker is mostly assigned during the afternoon or evening and has full access to helpful data on people of concern. "We try to identify through our analysis in the times of calls, as to the best time to use them," he said.

So far, the project — based on a similar one in Hamilton — appears to be a "big success."

For one, he said, it makes for better initial contact with the person in distress, he said.

"We have a mental health worker right there at the beginning (so we) can resolve a lot of things and get them to the hospital."

It's also easier to assess whether that person doesn't need to go the hospital — something that can eat up huge police and professional resources.

The chief said it's also "better care for the patient and de-escalates situations."

Asked about the possibility of the worker ridealong becoming a 24-hour service, McGuire said "it all comes down to cost as well.

"But we may get to the point where we'll see if we can expand the hours, do a better analysis on what calls they went to at what time and the location, so we can deploy them better."

If the pilot project is adopted as permanent, McGuire said he expects the NRP would try to roll it out across the region.

JULIE JOCSAK/ST. CATHARINES STANDARD

Standard reporter Grant LaFleche, right, chats with chief Jeff McGuire of the Niagara Regional Police Service.

Concrete slab still missing in homicide case

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

Seven months after launching a homicide investigation into the disappearance of 22-year-old Shawn Kapadia, Toronto police have no progress to report.

Last fall, Toronto police asked for the community's help locating a concrete slab in the south Niagara area. Police believe the remains of the missing Mississauga man may be encased by it.

"There's no update at this time," Toronto Police Const. Caroline deKloet said last week.

"We are looking with anyone who may have information to contact the Toronto Police homicide squad," she said.

Although there are no new developments at this time, deKloet said police hope keep the case in the public eye "so people don't forget about what had happened."

Kapadia was last seen leaving his home July 5, and police have reason to suspect he was murdered the same day at a townhouse on Foundry Avenue.

The Toronto Police investigation shifted to a home on O'Reilly's Road in Wainfleet after Kapadia's car, a 2007 Pontiac G6, was found there.

Police said a yellow John Deere backhoe was seen at the Wainfleet home on Saturday, July 11. And video surveillance cameras captured images of the backhoe, heading east on Broadway Avenue in Welland a day later. A large concrete block was in its bucket.

Although the backhoe was found near the QEW and Highway 420 in Niagara Falls, on July 23, the concrete block was not recovered.

Anyone with information is asked to Toronto homicide detectives at 416-808-7400, ext. 77418, Niagara Regional Police at 905-735-7811 ext. 3300, or Crime Stoppers at 416-222-TIPS.

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Forum champions basic income guarantee concept

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

Poverty is a devastating and costly problem in Niagara.

Its effects are legion — crimes of necessity, poor health, homelessness, mental illness, isolation from society, family disruption and more.

At a Niagara Social Justice Forum held at Brock University Saturday, a presentation highlighted the desperate world of Niagara poverty and the value of a basic income guarantee.

The seminar by Niagara Poverty Reduction Network and Basic Income Guarantee Working Group stressed that income guarantee trials have proven it can dramatically reduce poverty, improve a society's functioning and is generally not a work disincentive.

It also came on the heels of Niagara Region council throwing its support behind a call for a guaranteed basic income.

On Thursday, councillors voted in favour of a motion calling on provincial and federal governments to work towards developing a guaranteed income, adding their support to a motion approved by the City of Kingston in December.

Glen Walker and Willy Noiles of the poverty network led the forum by underscoring the depth of poverty's reach in Niagara.

"Is there poverty in Niagara?" said Walker, who is chair of the network and executive director of Positive Living Niagara. "The answer is yes, it's definitely here."

Among 2013 statistics revealed was that more than 67,000 shelter beds are occupied here each year — 13 per cent by children.

In the region, 11,035 people are waiting for affordable housing in a group that includes families, single adults and couples and seniors.

The consequences of poverty cost Niagara $1.38 billion a year, the seminar group was told.

"Poverty is complex with interlocking causes and effects," said Noiles. "And we know we must address income to address poverty."

Supporting poverty is a plethora of issues that include a lack of affordable transportation and accommodation, insufficient government supports, precarious employment situations, and unaddressed health issues, he said.

Pushing you further into it can be disruptive family events, a job loss, poor education or personal troubles.

"We know poverty is (also) a drain on hope," Noiles said. "It is our collective problem."

Rhonda Barron of the basic income working group laid out the case for an income guarantee — one supported by evidence in trials and pilot projects. The concept is not a new one, she said, citing variants such as the Canada Child Tax Benefit and Old Age Security pension and the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

"If we were to implement a guaranteed income that (also) doesn't mean a complete dismantling of the social safety net," said Barron, who is also a health promoter with Bridges Community Health Centre in south Niagara.

It has been found in Canadian and other studies, that the plans do not dissuade work. Another British study showed money is not misused by purchases of alcohol and drugs.

Its many benefits include improved overall health, stronger families, fewer hospital and doctor visits and better savings habits.

One form of it is a negative income tax, whereby anyone below a low-income threshold pays no tax and a tax grant ensures everyone is brought up to a low-income threshold.

A tax scheme can also create further work-income incentives.

At least 250 people gathered for the ninth-annual forum titled Building Solidarities and hosted by Brock's masters program in social justice and equity studies and the Social Justice Research Institute. Other sessions covered subjects that included Fist Nations advocacy, connecting the environmental movement and other social justice struggles.

Carissa Taylor, an event co-organizer, said the forum "reflects a desire to do progressive work and involve the community by bringing them on to campus in a way that built (these) relationships."

"And it's just grown every year."

DON FRASER/ STANDARD STAFF

Glen Walker of Niagara Poverty Reduction Network is pictured at the Niagara Social Justice Forum held Saturday at Brock University.

Region supports basic income guarantee

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

While several Regional councillors had concerns about throwing their support behind a call for a guaranteed basic income, the majority couldn't wait to support it.

Following a presentation from Niagara Poverty Reduction Network representatives at Thursday's regional council meeting, councillors voted against a recommendation to refer the discussion to the committee level for a report, and instead opted to vote in favour of a motion calling on provincial and federal governments to work towards developing a guaranteed basic income – adding their support to a motion approved by the City of Kingston in December.

During her presentation, NPRN representative Rhonda Barron discussed a "strong and compelling rationale for supporting the need for a basic income guarantee."

"This is the direct result of economic policies – the availability of good stable paying jobs is in short supply," she said. "We know that working is no longer a pathway out of poverty, when working full time at minimum wage means that you are still living below the poverty line."

She said automation is replacing human labour, and it's taking away many people's livelihoods.

"We know that artificial intelligence has replaced many low and middle income jobs and that those jobs are not coming back," Barron said. "The full implications of the new machine age are going to take at least a century to play out, but for now the growing pains are very real."

She said opponents of the idea say it will cost too much, it's a recipe for laziness and there's a "firmly entrenched ideology that if I work hard so should you."

But when the cost associated with poverty are added up, such as health care, criminal justice, lost work and productivity, she said it's poverty that is costing too much "and we can't afford not to address it."

"The Niagara (Community) Observatory did a study in 2012 that tells us the cost of the consequences of poverty in Niagara are $1.38-billion," she said.

"If we are paying for poverty, why not pay to prevent it?"

But several councillors wanted to see more evidence supporting the initiative before they would sign off on the concept.

St. Catharines Coun. Tim Rigby said council needs to have some more detail about the dollars and cents of the initiative before making a decision.

St. Catharines Coun. Brian Heit questioned the cost estimates. "That's huge," he said. "I'd like to know how they got that number."

Niagara Falls Coun. Bob Gale wanted to more information about communities where a guaranteed basic income had previously been implemented, and he wanted to know why that information wasn't provided earlier.

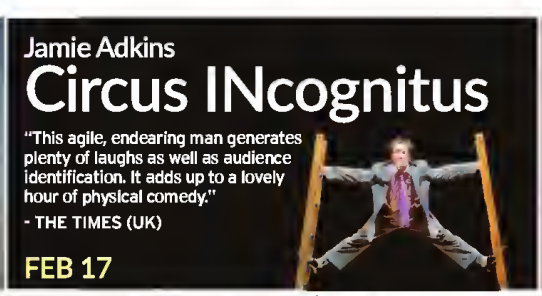
"I'd like to look at comparative cities, if you don't mind, and what they've done with this and how it works," he said.

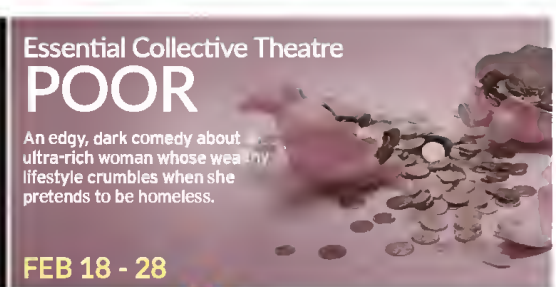
"I need a lot more information," said St. Catharines Coun. Bruce Timms.

SUPPORT FOR GUARANTEED BASIC INCOME

The motion was approved with a 21-6 vote.

Opposed: Douglas Joyner, Brian Heit, Bart Maves, Andy Petrowski, Tim Rigby and Bruce Timms





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Suspect list updated

BILL SAWCHUK
Postmedia Network

Three new faces have joined the Niagara's Wanted program.

Niagara Regional Police recently updated a list of suspects for which they are searching to include Aaron Fick, Cheryl Lafontaine and Steven Corkery. Corkery also goes by the name Esteban Criger.

Aaron Fick

Fick, 37, of Niagara Falls is wanted for fraud under $5,000.

Lafontaine, 53, of Fort Erie is wanted for two counts of theft under $5,000.

Corkery, a.k.a. Criger, 25, of Niagara Falls and St. Catharines is wanted for theft under $5,000, resisting arrest, breach of probation and three counts of breach of an undertaking.

They join two others for which the police are on the lookout.

John Mundinatz, 27, of St. Catharines is wanted for assault and driving while prohibited.

Brody Racine, 34, of Thorold is wanted for fraud under $5,000 and breach of recognizance.

Police took names off the list with some recent arrests. Listed as arrested are Sean Patrick, Amanda Ruelland and Marie Francine Crabbe.

Patrick, 42, of St. Catharines was wanted for robbery and failure to comply.

Ruelland, 27, was wanted for breach of probation.

Crabbe (a.k.a. France Boivin), 55, was wanted for obstructing police and personation with intent (a form of identity fraud).

Anybody with information is asked to contact police at 905-688-4111 and request to speak to dispatch, or contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 or text your tip to 274637 (CRIMES).

Credit union manager likes to give back

WAYNE CAMPBELL
Special to Postmedia Network

John Wink follows advice from an early hoss.

He told Wink to think hack to when he was a kid. To think of the coaches and others who committed time to help him. Now, it was time to give hack.

Wink, 62, is manager of Meridian Credit Union's Fonthill hranch. He says he is fortunate to have an employer whose philosophy of community involvement matches his.

Wink chairs the Pelham Summerfest committee, just spent seven years with United Way, served as president of the Pelham Business Association and coached minor haskethall, hasehall and soccer teams.

Now he's Fonthill and District Kinsmen's 2015 citizen of the year.

Kinsmen puhlicity director Kevin Twomey says Wink's dedication and leadership along with his passion for the community "exemplifies the purpose and meaning of this award."

John Wink

The prize is intended to inspire people to volunteer.

Wink says he was surprised and honoured, especially after he read the list of earlier recipients which includes Eric Bergenstein and Gord Klager.

"I'm really a team player and don't look for recognition," he says.

To suddenly find himself in the spotlight is "unusual to say the least."

Wink has lived in Fonthill since 1986 and for 32 years has worked for Niagara Credit Union which hecame Meridian Credit Union, serving as Fonthill hranch manager for eight.

> **"I'm really a team player and don't look for recognition."**

He grew up in Guelph. He says he was always active. He played minor hockey and soccer, and was on the University of Waterloo soccer team for a year. Then it was slo-pitch and golf while the time allowed after his career and volunteer work.

He has a son and daughter and two stepdaughters. His joh and family drew him into what he calls a very active Pelham community.

Wink says the Kinsmen citizen of the year award is an effective way to encourage volunteerism.

"You should take the time to get involved in your community," he says. "Be proud of it, he part of it."

The Kinsmen will present the award at a hanquet in Old Pelham Town Hall on Tuesday, March 1.

Recipients of the 18-year-old award

Carolyn Mullin 1998, Tony Finamore 1999, Jake Dilts 2000, Eric Bergenstein 2001, George Kowalski 2002, Anne Robbins 2003, Catherine Kuckyt 2004, Gerry Berkhout 2005, Paul Ryan 2006, Gayle Baltjes-Chataway 2007, Rick Lowes 2008, Gail Hilyer 2009, Gord Klager 2010, Sandra Warden 2011, Fred Disher 2012, David Swan 2013, Rosemary and Gary Chambers 2014

Rotary lends a hand to wellspring

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Rotary Club of Fonthill president Frank Adamson, right, delivers a cheque for $3,000 to Niagara Regional Police deputy chief Joe Matthews, left, who is also Wellspring Niagara board chairman, and Wellspring executive director Ann Mantini-Celima during a recent Rotary breakfast meeting. The money was raised as part of the annual Pelham Mudfest Challenge, which takes place this year May 14 at Bissell's Hideaway in Ridgeville. The fun-run obstacle course costs $75 per entrant, although the early bird price is in effect until the end of February, in which participants can sign up for $65 each. Details available at pelhammudfest.ca.

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Gift cards no gift to Mother Earth: students

Fonthill Nurdles is asking Pelham to help recycle gift cards.

The First Lego League Robotics team from St. Alexander's Catholic School, as part of a provincial competition, chose the disposal of gift cards as a trash problem to solve.

Student members told town council more than 10 billion gift cards are produced in North America and 34 million kilograms end up in landfills where they release toxic polyvinyl chloride (PVC) into the environment.

The Nurdles, with the help of Tim Hortons, Seaway Mall and Giant Tiger, collected almost 45 kilograms of cards in one month.

They found two solutions to dispose of them. TerraCycle in Toronto deals with difficult to recycle items. Earthworks in Ohio recycles polymeric materials to manufacture new plastic cards.

Students asked the town to sponsor a prepaid TerraCycle box for disposal of used gift cards from local businesses.

Councillors sent the request to staff for a report.

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Province to tackle PTSD in first responders

FRANKI IKEMAN/WELLAND TRIBUNE

Scott Lawson, from left, Joe Bilodeau and Brian Lofthouse are pictured at the Port Colborne fire department Wednesday.

FRANKI IKEMAN
Postmedia Network

Port Colborne Fire and Emergency Services fire prevention officer Scott Lawson says it's important that people deal with stress related to traumatic incidents the same way they might deal with a cold.

"If you deal with the cold right away, it doesn't become that infection, those sinus problems, you don't get pneumonia and all that other stuff," Lawson said. "It's no different than what we do with our debriefings (after a bad call).

"If you can deal with it early ,it shouldn't become a severe issue."

One of the severe issues is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), an illness first responders are twice as likely to suffer from than the general population, the Ontario Ministry of Labour said in a news release.

The release was issued to announce new initiatives from the province to try to prevent PTSD among emergency responders.

"When we talk to experts about PTSD, they tell us that it's not curable, that once you have PTSD it's about management," Labour Minister Kevin Flynn said.

Flynn said that research suggests that PTSD is, however, preventable. He said that the province's preventative strategy focuses around four pillars: a radio and digital campaign aimed at increasing awareness about PTSD and eliminating stigma, an annual leadership summit to highlight best practices, recognize leaders and monitor progress in dealing with PTSD, a free online toolkit and grants for research that supports the prevention of PTSD.

He said the strategy not only gets information on PTSD to the public, but sends a message back to first responders.

"It also, I think, tells the first responders themselves that we care about them, that the people who they keep safe care about their safety as well," Flynn said.

Port Colborne firefighter Joe Bilodeau is part of a critical incidence stress management (CISM) team working to make sure that firefighters have an outlet to talk about work-related stressors.

Bilodeau said that working in a small community, such as Port Colborne, means that often calls strike a personal nerve, making the likelihood of a personal reaction higher.

"It's very personal, especially in smaller communities," Bilodeau said. "I have had a number of calls where I've known the person very, very close."

"You know what the problem is with firefighting, is you watch it on TV. I mean they go into all these burning buildings and they can see for miles, they always walk out with the baby, they're all dirty on their face and everybody slaps each other on the back and you feel good," he said.

"Our job is nothing like what you see on TV," Lawson said.

Brian Lofthouse, Port Colborne fire chaplain, has worked on the regional CISM team for more than a decade. He said that a lot has changed in the way firefighters deal with their critical incident stress. He said 10 years ago he may have come for a meeting following a traumatic incident and no one would take the help being offered, whereas now half of the team or more would.

"I believe that we're coming to a point where mental illness is being treated like a broken leg," Lofthouse said. "We're still not there, but we're coming closer and closer."

"The more you talk about it, the more it's out there, the more people are willing to talk about the bad call," Bilodeau said.

It's a shift in perception being seen across the province, Flynn said.

"They're starting to realize that mental health injuries, including PTSD, are just as debilitating as physical injuries," he said.

Flynn said this week's announcement is just part of a provincial plan to tackle PTSD, the next step being for him to bring a "comprehensive strategy" to Queen's Park for discussion.

"Hopefully, in the not too very distant future we have the best and the most comprehensive strategy to deal with PTSD," Flynn said. "I'd really like to see the day where PTSD is a thing of the past."

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Niagara honours for a giant of freedom

PHOTO SPECIAL TO POSTMEDIA

On Tuesday, students in St. Catharines officially welcomed Harriet Tubman to her namesake school. A life-sized statue of the iconic freedom fighter was to be unveiled. It was created by former Niagara artists Frank Rekrut and Laura Thompson.

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

Freedom.

It's a word that resonates with Rochelle Bush, and one epitomized by a supremely brave woman.

Emancipation from the chains of slavery, and to live a life without bondage.

For Bush, the fact "she was adamant about having her freedom" was the essence of Harriet Tubman.

"Not only for herself, her family and others who were enslaved," said Bush, a trustee and historian at the British Methodist Episcopal Church on Geneva Street in St. Catharines. "She had personally seen its injustice.

"And she was extremely selfless — Tubman died penniless and broke, because everything she did went to others. She had strength of character, selflessness, and my God she was a fighter."

Bush said Tubman never had a lot of money, but her friends in Auburn, N.Y. provided a home for her that she later bequeathed to her church.

Tubman is on the minds of many with February being Black History Month and with the unveiling on Tuesday of a statue in her likeness at her new namesake school in midtown St. Catharines.

The former St. Catharines resident is a hero, especially to black North Americans, as a leader of the Underground Railroad movement.

Many of her slave-freeing missions that started from the southern United States ended up in Niagara. She lived in St. Catharines from 1851 to 1861.

Tubman is an historical giant, of world stature.

A BME Church website tribute to her notes in 1999 the A&E Network asked prominent scientists, historians, theologians and others to compile a list of the 100 most influential people of the last millennium. Tubman was the only one recognized solely for anti-slavery work.

"Heralded as a military genius, freedom fighter and a strict disciplinarian who suffered from epileptic seizures, (she) could neither read nor write," the site notes.

Tubman was born Araminta Ross around 1822 on a Maryland plantation, where like so many other slaves she suffered abuse and injury.

She freed herself in 1849 and used the railroad network — a euphemism for the private citizens who risked their own safety to help slaves elude the authorities — to escape to Philadelphia.

This secret resistance movement was aided by abolitionists and used coded words and signals in their infiltration to help slave runaways make their way to freedom.

The website notes that eventually, Tubman made her way to St. Catharines in Canada West, part of British North America and a place that abolished slavery in 1834.

She made her first trip to Niagara with 11 freedom seekers in 1851, with the Salem Chapel of the BME Church on Geneva Street her place of worship.

While here, she helped escaped slaves on their way to friendlier northern areas. She rented and operated a boarding house on North Street and also helped establish the Fugitive Aid Society in St. Catharines. She was married twice, and had an adopted daughter.

For Bush, it's important to recognize Tubman's deep-seated Christianity "and how she understood that even in this Protestant world, there were two separate Jesuses, and that still rings true today.

"There was the southern Jesus who kept us enslaved, and the northern Jesus who said we should be set free," said Bush, who first learned of Tubman at Sunday School.

Tubman's life turned to another path later in her life. In 1862, she was recruited to join the Union Army in the American Civil War, where she provided help and nursing care to black soldiers and liberated African-Americans. She also spied and scouted Confederate lines and liberated hundreds held in bondage.

She settled in Auburn, N.Y. after the war. There, she was active as a suffragist and humanitarian. She died in that town March 10, 1913, and her house is preserved still as a tourist site.

"What a courageous, remarkable woman she was," said Ada Summers, a BME Church treasurer and trustee in St. Catharines. "Myself, women today, couldn't do what she did.

STORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 11

SCHOOL HONOURS ITS UNDERGROUND RAILROAD CONDUCTOR

On Tuesday, students in St. Catharines officially welcomed Harriet Tubman to her namesake school.

A life-size statue of the iconic freedom fighter was unveiled. It was created by former Niagara artists Frank Rekrut and Laura Thompson.

The bronze statue features a seated Tubman with a book in her lap, according to the District School Board of Niagara in a release. Although Tubman couldn't read, there are stories of her pretending to read to avoid capture.

Frank Rekrut, who now lives in Florence, Italy, has a special link to Tubman. In 2010, he donated a portrait bust of Tubman to the British Methodist Episcopal church on Geneva Street.

He became interested in working with the school board when he learned the school would be named for Tubman.

To finance the cost of the statue and transportation, the DSBN launched the Bringing Harriet Home campaign. People, schools and organizations all contributed.

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St. Catharines school first in Canada named for Tubman

FROM PAGE 10

"We couldn't make all those trips back and forth and bring all those people to freedom and manage to survive along the way."

Another BME church with links to Tubman and the black journey to freedom is in Niagara Falls and this year turns 180 years old.

Falls church treasurer Wilma Morrison said black women in general have done much heavy lifting, and Canadian black history is a rich source of pride and enduring community.

She recounts tour groups that come to her church, where she'll point to a male in the group. She'll tell him how much she admires the person: "But at the same time, I always emphasize the fact that there's nothing like a strong black woman.

"And that's one of the reasons we've been able to get past all this (history of being oppressed)," said Morrison, a Niagara Falls resident widely recognized and honoured for her work in documenting and promoting black history in Canada.

Among others, she has received the Lieutenant-Governor's Ontario Heritage Award and was named to the Order of Ontario. At the BME church on Peer Street in Niagara Falls, she helped establish the Norval Johnson Library, a collection of books and historical documents on the history of blacks in Canada.

JULIE JOCSAK/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Ada Summers, Harriet Tubman School principal Ronna Lockyer, Rochelle Bush and Donna Ford are photographed at BME Church on Geneva Street.

Of Tubman, she said: "I admire her. She was a wonderful woman and did wonderful things, and sacrificed a lot for the people she brought here.

"I would like to see our own (Canadian) history touted ... as well," said Morrison.

Ronna Lockyer is the first principal of Harriet Tubman School, which opened last year and consolidates the now-closed Alexandra, Maywood, Memorial and Queen Mary schools.

It's likely about the fifth school so named in North America, including one in Buffalo, but the first in Canada.

"What an honour it's been, and kind of magical how everything has aligned," Lockyer said. "First, because the (District School Board of Niagara) named the school for her, then from so many relationships and contacts we've made because of it."

Lockyer has also come to learn much more about Tubman and her legacy.

"There's no doubt she made a number of trips, a great deal of them by foot, to (Maryland)," said Lockyer. "At night, following the North Star walking by the water to lose their scents so they couldn't be tracked — she did that to escape, and then to return to (rescue) more people.

"And she was tough. She told those joining her to freedom that there was no quitting. You couldn't walk for three days, then decide 'I'm done, I can't go on now,' as that would compromise the safety of everyone.

"The woman is an inspiration."

At the BME Church in St. Catharines, Bush said she and others will join Lockyer for next week's unveiling of the Tubman statue.

"We're going to be there, and it'll be phenomenal for sure," said Bush.

"And I can't thank the DSBN enough ... and we weren't jockeying for that name change. They did it on their own."

As a voice of the new generation of young black Canadians, Amara Easey, 12, will be there to help celebrate Tubman's life.

Amara said she had heard of Tubman's feats from her aunt, researched her more, and that became a reason for her wanting to be a student at the school in Tubman's name.

"I think she's an incredible person and has a lot of courage," she said. "Harriet Tubman is my hero.

"She had such great people that helped her along the way. For doing something like that, in those times, she could have been killed. Harriet was very brave."

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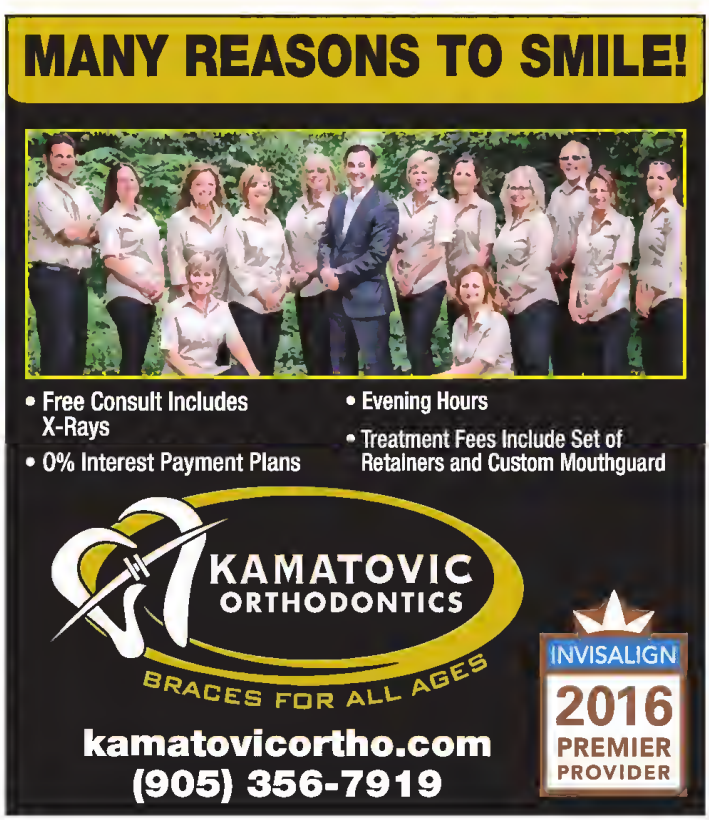

Calling 211 will point you in the right direction

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

If you have a question but don't know who to ask, INCommunities will point you in the right direction.

The organization — formerly named Information Niagara — was created in 1974 to connect people with local services. The organization was formed due to a need for information about services including child care, mental health providers and taxes.

Initially people would call its phone number or go to the location in Niagara Falls to access services — that location has since closed. The organization is now in St. Catharines.

In 2005, INCommunities acquired the right to use the phone number 211, so people could connect with community services faster.

"We had the same difficulties that other organizations had," said retired executive director Rosanna Thoms. "People had to know our number — it was a 10-digit number ... People were having the same difficulties finding us as they did finding other organizations. So when 211 was designated it just made perfect sense. We had this easy to remember number."

MICHELLE ALLENBERG/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

INCommunities executive director Tammy Dumas and former executive director Rosanna Thoms are pictured at the INCommunities office in St. Catharines.

Thoms worked for the organization for 37 years before retiring in December.

Thoms was trained to be a teacher, but started working for Information Niagara in 1978 because there were no teaching jobs available.

"For me it was the impact this organization made in people's lives. The self-gratification of going home every day knowing 'god I've helped 20 people today.' And people were always so grateful, so even when teaching jobs started to open I thought, do I want to deal with other people's children? Or do I want to help people?

"Sometimes life is complicated, we know that. For many people it is more complicated than for others. Those are the kind of people that tend to dial 211 because they have a whole series of things happening," Thoms said.

Staff at the organization are trained to speak to people who have a problem and assess what that person needs. Staff will point them in the right direction by providing a couple options for the person to choose from.

Thoms said providing information to people became important to her. There was never a year when she didn't learn something new. She said there were always new programs, projects and technology to learn about or develop.

"The world was changing. When we started we collected information on recipe cards, and then through my era I saw a move to computers," Thoms said.

The information was put in an orange book and distributed to other organizations. With the proliferation of computers it became easier for information to be shared and kept up to date.

In a day INCommunities receives about 125 calls. This fluctuates depending on the time of year. During elections or income tax time, Thoms said, calls increase.

Calls also spike during power outages and emergencies.

"It's in those moments ... when something is happening, we are the number to call if it's not an emergency, said new executive director Tammy Dumas. "So people aren't calling 911 in non-emergency situations. They can call 211 in those cases."

INCommunities also run programs that provide people with interpreters, and volunteer connections which has an online database that people can find volunteer opportunities through.

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Niagara and its pervasive identity crisis

CHARLES CONTEH
Special to Postmedia Network

By all indications, Niagara is on the cusp of a new era. On the positive side of this transformation is the emergence of new and more assertive players that can serve as agents of coordinated action. Think of postsecondary actors like Brock's BioLink and Niagara College's ncTakeOff project. Imagine community conduits like Niagara Connects institutionalizing forums of knowledge exchange. Add to this the growing prospects of advanced manufacturing and green technology sectors in the region. I can go on.

On the negative side of this crossroads, however, is the persistence of youth outmigration, the threatening spectre of a quiet brain drain, a stubborn prevalence of poverty and inequality, and the existential crisis of a region still struggling to find its identity. In fact, resolving the identity question is at the root of the region's capacity to take on the threats and exploit the opportunities of global economic turbulence that is rocking every boat out there.

Thankfully, the region recognizes this fact. Historical records indicate that Niagara has long been pondering and debating the question about its own identity: Is it just a geographic territory consisting of 12 municipalities, each minding their own business; or is it a region that is more than the sum of its parts. If it is the former, then each municipality can, as much as possible, politely coexist with their neighbours while struggling to keep their heads above the swelling waters of global economic tide. If it is the latter, however, there will be such a sense of shared social and economic destiny that the leadership will be sufficiently motivated to align their institutions for core functions like an integrated infrastructure and public transit as well as pooling resources to support emerging industries and combat poverty in the region.

The conversation about Niagara reconfiguring its institutions started many decades ago. Major studies commissioned by the region have helped illuminate the options but politics have not allowed for a concerted resolution.

One of these earlier studies was led by Woods Gordon who issued a report in 1979, co-facilitated by the Province of Ontario and the Regional Municipality of Niagara. The purpose of this study was to formulate an action plan in response to the region's economic decline. Among Woods Gordon's many observations was a fairly straightforward recommendation; to integrate the region's economic assets through a strong and legitimate body — a regional economic development commission.

An interesting part of the report was its audacity to recommend that existing development offices in St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Welland and Fort Erie be phased out after one year. Politics prevailed over reason. Leaders from these four cities quickly marshalled a range of lethal equipment and sent the report to its untimely grave.

But another attempt was made to save the region. Torben Drewes issued a second report in 1988, titled "Economic Development in the Niagara Region." The report griped about the well-known institutional deficiencies, including the lack of formal divisions of function and the absence of clear statutory provisions stipulating policies and procedures for coordination between the region and its constituent parts.

Never tired of commissioning new studies, Niagara Region hired the Randolph Group which released another report in 2010. The report lamented the same woes: the need to clarify roles and responsibilities between the region and constituent functions, and to build cooperation and trust among the leadership. After reviewing the report's diagnostics, the region decided to establish a task force to conduct a further study.

The economic development task force (EDTF) was launched in March 2011 to study Niagara's economic development structure. Now, all these studies have provided a wealth of information about where things have gone wrong in the past, and what can be done about them. The path forward if we are to take the bull of the 21st century by its horn is to reconfigure our institutions of governance for more concerted action.

Charles Conteh is an associate professor of public policy and management in the department of political science at Brock University. His research interest is to understand how cities and regions are adapting to global economic changes. He can be reached at cconteh@brocku.ca.

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